**WORSHIP RESOURCES**

12 December 2021

Third Sunday of Advent (Joy)

**Zephaniah 3:14-20**

Sing and Rejoice!

**Additional Scriptures**

*Isaiah 12:2-6; Luke 3:7-18; Philippians 4:4-7; Doctrine and Covenants 163:9*

Preparation

*Review the Advent 2021 Preparation Guidelines on page 35.*

*Before the service, add a star above the stable at the front of the worship space. Provide five Advent candles to be lit during the Advent Readers Theater. Light the candles of Hope and Love before the service begins.*

Prelude

Carols of the Season *Choose two.*

“O Come, O Come Emmanuel” *CCS* 394

“Joy to the World!” *CCS* 408

“What Child Is This” *CCS* 432

Welcome

Advent Readers Theater

and Lighting of the Joy Candle

*See script at the end of service.*

Advent Prayer

O God of joy and light, Today we will rejoicein the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone so that we remember that the Lord is near. Let us remember not to worry about anything, but in everything through prayer and supplication, and with thanksgiving let our requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard our hearts and our minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

—Philippians 4:4-7, adapted

OR

Video: “Joy” by The Skit Guys

*skitguys.com/videos/advent-worship-4*

*Secure the necessary permission to show and stream this video.*

Advent Hymn of Joy

“Hope Is a Light” *Stanza 3* *CCS* 398

Prayer for Peace

*Light the Peace Candle.*

Prayer

God of Joy,

Sometimes it is hard for us to remember that you created both tears of sadness and tears of joy. We see so many situations for which we empathize: families in need of food, lonely people in search of friendship, animals in search of new homes, and earth in need of rest. You are with us.

We see your hand at work in creating peace in our communities. May we join you in creating this peace. We pray for the lonely, the hungry, the homeless, and the tired. And now, please strengthen us to hug, to feed, to provide, and to care for all in need.

Fill us with your joy as we strive to share peace. May our joy overflow and bless those we serve.

In the name of your son, Jesus, the one we wait for and who gives us great joy! Amen.

—Tiffany and Caleb Brian

*A Daily Prayer for Peace is shared 365 days a year. Find additional ideas for Prayer for Peace on the church’s website.*

Hymn or Ministry of Music

“Not in Grand Estate” *CCS* 444

OR “On Jordan’s Banks the Baptist’s Cry” *CCS* 391

Spiritual Practice

Naming Blessings

*Provide one 4x6-inch piece of white cardstock and a pencil for each person. For those viewing online be sure to give them notice to have paper and a pencil on hand. Have soft music ready to play in the background.*

Awareness of all of our blessings can bring us joy. Please join us for today’s spiritual practice. At this time, on the provided card, you are welcome to list or draw three of your favorite blessings. *Pause to give time to write or draw.*

Most likely you thought of more blessings than the three you listed. We are so fortunate. To continue this spiritual practice of joy throughout your week I invite you to take your card home and add an additional blessing or more each day. May you feel joy knowing that you are loved and blessed.

Advent Scripture of Joy

Zephaniah 3:14-20

Experience Joy

Gratitude Creates Joy and a Desire to Bless Others

*Have the words to the Responsive Reading projected or printed, available to all.*

*Gather Ziploc bags, notes of encouragement, variety of travel-size toothbrushes, toothpaste, baby wipes, first-aid kits, minipacks of tissues, trail mix snacks, cracker snack packs, dried fruit snacks, granola bars, water bottles, hand warmers, deodorant, lip balm, combs, fragrance-free lotions, socks, underwear, T-shirts, gloves, hats, or gum.*

*Activity: Make Blessing Bags—full of essential items for those in need. When done, pray for the people who will receive your blessing bags. Congregants may take Blessing Bags to hand out to those they see in need in their community.*

Think/Pair/Share

*The key word is* ***think****. Allow time for all to process and then* ***share*** *their thoughts about questions for reflection.*

Reflection Questions

* 1. Describe a time that you received with joy.
  2. Describe a time that you experienced joy in giving.We are called to love each person placed in our path.
  3. Describe how you can bless others in your life.

Responsive Reading

Leader: God of generosity, you provide for all of my needs. You teach me how to

give and receive with joy. Daily you remind me:

**Congregation**:

**Express gratitude.**

**Bless others.**

**Speak lovingly.**

Hymn of Transformation

“Once in Royal David’s City” *CCS* 429

OR “View the Present through the Promise” *CCS* 401

OR “Tomorrow Christ Is Coming” *CCS* 406

Message of Joy

Based on Zephaniah 3:14-20

Disciples’ Generous Response

*Photos to share: https://www.dropbox.com/s/nz2oq77abpmb8kz/  
DGR%20Photos%20for%2012-12-21.zip?dl=0*

Statement

*Today’s Disciples’ Generous Response story comes from Apostle Carlos Enriche Mejia who serves the Central and South America Mission Field.*

The whole world has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, many people have been infected, others have lost their loved ones to the disease.

This situation still keeps many of us at home, taking care of ourselves and our families; church activities and worship services at buildings in many places are still suspended, and up until now it has been impossible to hold them in person; schools, companies, and businesses are closed; this left many people out of work and without an income. The lack of food has been the worst. All pastors cared for our members and it was necessary to resort to using reserves from local offerings to feed families.

Brother Gonzalo Mejia, President of the Central America Mission Center made an invitation to all Pastors of the rural areas to encourage members who grow staple grains to give according to their capacity, to provide for sisters and brothers from congregations in the urban areas, who worked in maquiladora factories, were out of work, and were struggling to feed their families.

The response was immediate, pastors of the Copan area in Honduras, where we have three rural congregations, called to tell us that they had more than two thousand pounds of food they collected from among themselves and communities of people who are not members of any church.

We took all necessary precautions and drove there. We took two vehicles to bring this food and, let me tell you brothers and sisters, it was a unique experience to see the joy of the people sharing. But it was even more surprising that after loading the vehicles, the pastor told me, “Apostle, the brothers and sisters joyously collected cash to help,” and he gave me the equivalent of about $35.00 USD. This amount may not seem like much money, but for the difficult financial circumstances they live in, this represents almost six days’ worth of salary for one person.

I believe the witness in action of these brothers and sisters speak to their generosity, solidarity, and the joy of supporting people in need.

Brothers and sisters, this whole experience reminded me of the Macedonian Church who, in the midst of a great trial of affliction, poured out its generosity and provided for other people with joy.

* How have you lived out this pandemic in your community?
* What are the biggest needs you have seen among our members and the people in your community?
* How are you or your congregation responding to end the suffering being experienced at this time?

It is wonderful what Doctrine and Covenants 163:9 tells us:

Faithful disciples respond to an increasing awareness of the abundant generosity of God by sharing according to the desires of their hearts; not by commandment or constraint. Break free of the shackles of conventional culture that mainly promote self-serving interests. Give generously according to your true capacity. Eternal joy and peace await those who grow in the grace of generosity that flows from compassionate hearts without thought of return.

During the Disciples’ Generous Response, we focus on aligning our heart

with God’s heart. Our offerings are more than meeting budgets or funding

mission. Through our offerings we are able to tangibly express our

gratitude to God who is the giver of all.

As we share our mission tithes either by placing money in the plates or

through eTithing, use this time to thank God for the many gifts received in

life. Our hearts grow aligned with God’s when we gratefully receive and

faithfully respond by living Christ’s mission.

Blessing and Receiving of Local and Worldwide Mission Tithes

*For additional ideas, see Disciples’ Generous Response Tools on the church’s website.*

Hymn

“Go, Tell It on the Mountain” *CCS* 409

OR “Angels We Have Heard on High” *CCS* 427

OR “When the Present Holds No Promise” *CCS* 430

Prayer of Blessing

Response

Postlude

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Readers Theater

by David Loy

*Readers theater is a style of theater in which the actors present dramatic readings of narrative material without costumes, props, scenery, or special lighting. Actors use vocal expression to help the audience understand the story.*

*Each actor will have a script from which to read. The scripts may be in identical handheld folders or on music stands in front of each actor. Hand gestures are allowed but other movement by the actors is not necessary. Identical or similar clothing is encouraged.*

*Because there is no movement, the focus is on the vocal properties of the actors. Similar voice quality and intonation will enhance the outcome of the theater presentation.*

*Reader 1 portrays a generally positive person.*

*Reader 2 portrays a generally negative person.*

*Reader 3 portrays a generally practical person.*

Third Sunday of Advent 2021—Joy

Reader 1—*Hands candlelighter to Reader 2, who lights the Advent Candle of Joy.*

Reader 1—Good morning, how was your week?

Reader 2—Remember when we talked about Jesus’s love last week and that I am

supposed to love that guy who really gets on my nerves?

Reader 1 & Reader 3—Yeah?

Reader 2—Well, I tried to treat him as Jesus would have, and I found out the guy isn’t nearly as bad as I thought. Not sure I can say “I love you” yet, but…

Reader 1—That’s wonderful. Don’t worry, it gets easier the more you try.

Reader 3—I surveyed my friends and asked if they knew about agape love. Not many of them did, so I explained it to them.

Reader 1—Wow! That’s terrific! Did it give you any joy to do that?

Reader 3—Joy? I don’t know that I would say that, but it did feel good.

Reader 1—I asked about joy because that’s what this Advent Sunday is about.

Reader 2—You mean happiness, laughing, that sort of thing?

Reader 1—Not exactly. It’s a different kind of joy.

Reader 3—More like “well-being” than “delight”?

Reader 1—Yes, but it’s about how Jesus talks about joy. The best thing is that both of you have already started down the road to Jesus’s kind of joy.

Reader 2 and Reader 3—Huh?

Reader 1—This joy goes together with the love we talked about last week. Let me

read from the Bible in the Gospel of John, chapter 15:

“As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.”

Reader 3—I think I get it! God’s love for Jesus is the same as Jesus has for us. Right?

Reader 1—Yep, keep going

Reader 3—And…

Reader 2—…If we love as Jesus taught, we will have joy?

Reader 1—Yes, by keeping The Great Commandment we will have joy.

Reader 3—Is that the one that says...We are to **love** the Lord with all our heart, soul, and mind and also to **love** our neighbor as our self.

Reader 2—I don’t even know my neighbors.

Reader 1—Well, it’s a good time to meet them and show them some love.

Reader 2—Really?

Reader 1—And “neighbor” refers to everyone on the planet. When you really love and care for all people equal to yourself, you’ll…

Reader 3 and Reader 2—…experience joy!

Reader 1—Exactly! You do get it!

Reader 2—So that’s what I felt when I delivered the food to those families and was

kind to the guy that used to bug me.

Reader 3—And when I told my friends about God’s love?

Reader 1—*Yes*, that’s it!

Reader 3—This Advent stuff is really educational…

Reader 2—…and fun!

Reader 1—Just wait for next week, it is my favorite one.

Reader 2 & Reader 3—What is it?

Reader 1—You’ll just have to wait and see.

Reader 2—OK.

Reader 1 to Reader 3—I know you wouldn’t ask me but, would you like to light the

candle next week?

Reader 3—Thank you for asking, that would be great.

Reader 1—Be good this week!

Reader 2—You bet.

Reader 3—I will, I want more of that joy.

**SERMON AND CLASS HELPS**

Year C—Old Testament

Third Sunday in Advent

# Zephaniah 3:14–20

Exploring the Scripture

Zephaniah is part of the Book of the Twelve, a collection of writings credited to writers known as minor prophets. Theologians and scholars have differing opinions about who authored it and when it was written. However, there is reasonable agreement it was likely written between 640 and 609 BCE. Similarly, there is general agreement that it was written to the people of Judah, who experienced domination and oppression by the Assyrians and Babylonians.

Most of the book is written in strong language, suggesting God’s judgment cannot be avoided and was to take place soon. The people are called into obedience and repentance from attitudes and actions such as idolatry, corruption, and injustice. The author then moves to a reassuring promise (today’s passage) that everything will turn out okay because “The Lord, your God, is in your midst” (v. 17).

For some, the Old Testament is a collection of writings depicting God as a merciless being whom we should fear. But here we have Zephaniah in which the author poignantly portrays the character of God as loving, exalting the lowly, and wishing to protect God’s children.

Yes, God wants people to follow God’s counsel and strive to do God’s will. But more importantly, God wants to bring us to a spirit of joy without fear. God does this by being “in your midst” (v. 17). Even while faced with trials and distress, oppression, and lack of food and water, God reassures the people that God is with us.

The people of Judah were facing great challenges. Many of us, especially in Western countries, experience a life of comparative ease and comfort. By reflecting on this story from Zephaniah, we can emphasize two thoughts.

First, we can feel connected through prayer with the people of the world who are indeed suffering the same challenges faced by the people of Judah. We can work to become God’s hands and feet to “remove disaster from you” (v. 18) and turn mourning into dancing.

Second, we recognize that God’s desires are for all people. As Zephaniah puts it, “I will make you renowned and praised among all the people of the earth” (v. 20). The prophet did not say *above* others, but *among* all the people.

This is a good passage for us to consider today, the third Sunday of Advent, because Jesus Christ is God in our midst. Jesus was called Emmanuel—God with us. God took human form to be fully “in your midst” (v. 15) and bless all people and show us the way to complete joy, hope, love, and peace.

Regardless of our circumstances, we can accept that God is in our midst. Because of that, we need not fear. Instead, we can experience joy in unbelievable ways. We can “rejoice with all (our) heart” (v. 14) and be free of fear. This is good news for any day and any age.

Central Ideas

1. God is a loving God who cares for those who are oppressed, downtrodden, and suffering in the world—whatever that may look like.
2. God yearns to “be in your midst” or incarnate. God does not want to stand far off, but “yearns to draw [us] close so that wounds may be healed, emptiness filled, and hope strengthened” (Doctrine and Covenants 163:10a).

Questions for the Speaker

1. When did you experience a time you were fearful, but because of the presence of the Holy Spirit “in your midst,” that fear was replaced with peace and perhaps even joy?
2. How might the Community of Christ Mission Initiatives and Enduring Principles provide guidance and a framework for disciples to be representatives of God among people?
3. Today’s scripture suggests people can rejoice even amid uncertainty, conflict, and pain. What are some ways you can suggest to help listeners experience such a way of life?

**SACRED SPACE:**

**A Resource for Small-group Ministry**

**Year C, Old Testament**

**Third Week of Advent**

**Zephaniah 3:14–20 NRSV**

**Gathering**

**Welcome**

Advent is a season of waiting in expectation for the coming of light into a darkened world in the form of the infant Jesus. Advent is spent anticipating and spiritually preparing for the arrival of the Christ-child. Scriptures, symbols, and hymns help make Advent a time of expectation for Christ’s birth, rather than a frenzy of holiday tasks.

The Advent season begins four Sundays before Christmas and is observed each Sunday until Christmas day. An Advent wreath with four candles and one Christ candle in the center often is used to observe the weeks of Advent. One candle is lit each week until all are burning brightly on Christmas day.

**Prayer for Peace**

*Ring a bell or chime three times slowly.*

*Light the peace candle.*

Igniter of the first flame,

You who gives oxygen to fire, you who gives fig trees fruit, you who gives expectant people hope, grant peace to those who wait in despair. As we celebrate joy, we know many struggle to feel your joy and peace. They struggle to find their voice in the world because they have lost the joy of singing and shouting excitedly!

But you are faithful, God. You will restore joy to those who have lost it, you will bring peace to the nations and return joy to lives in despair. Excite us anew, oh God, that we might share our joy with others and work for the kind of peace that delights you. As the potter forms clay, form us into a peaceful community that embraces and exudes peace. Pump us full of oxygen again, so that the peace flame may spark and grow and spread to all this season.

Amen.

—Caleb and Tiffany Brian

**Spiritual Practice**

**Journaling: Pregnant Waiting**

Materials:

* Advent wreath or ring for four candles
* One white candle to put in the center of the wreath
* Paper
* Pens or pencils

*Light the third candle of Advent and say:*

Today we light the third candle of Advent. This candle symbolizes Joy. May we share the joy in our lives with others.

*Read the following to the group:*

Just as birth is painful and joyous at the same time, life is a paradox full of joy and pain that live side by side. Joy is cultivated from within each of us as is our pain. Joy can come from journeying with God in ways that bring healing from pain.

As we companion with God, we experience anew the love and acceptance that has always been with us. The Christ child represents joy in our lives and in the world. Christ teaches us that we are all children of God, and that all are loved. “But the angel said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people” (Luke 2:10 NRSV).

*Pass out papers and pens and ask:*

When do you feel in touch with the joy inside of you? Share a story of when you have felt that joy in your life.

*Give the group 5 minutes to journal. Invite them to share their thoughts and feelings.*

**Sharing Around the Table**

**Zephaniah 3:14–20 NRSV**

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion;  
    shout, O Israel!  
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,  
    O daughter Jerusalem!  
The Lord has taken away the judgments against you,  
    he has turned away your enemies.  
The king of Israel, the Lord, is in your midst;  
    you shall fear disaster no more.  
On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:  
Do not fear, O Zion;  
    do not let your hands grow weak.  
The Lord, your God, is in your midst,  
    a warrior who gives victory;  
he will rejoice over you with gladness,  
    he will renew you in his love;  
he will exult over you with loud singing  
    as on a day of festival.   
I will remove disaster from you,   
    so that you will not bear reproach for it.  
I will deal with all your oppressors  
    at that time.  
And I will save the lame  
    and gather the outcast,  
and I will change their shame into praise  
    and renown in all the earth.  
At that time I will bring you home,  
    at the time when I gather you;  
for I will make you renowned and praised  
    among all the peoples of the earth,  
when I restore your fortunes  
    before your eyes, says the Lord.

Advent continues, and so does our call to preparation. Most of the book of Zephaniah is written in strong language, suggesting God’s judgment cannot be avoided and would take place soon. The people are called into obedience and repentance from attitudes and actions such as idolatry, corruption, and injustice. In today’s passage, however, the author moves to a reassuring promise that everything will turn out okay because, “The Lord, your God, is in your midst” (v. 17).

The author of Zephaniah poignantly portrays the character of God as loving, exalting the lowly, and wishing to protect God’s children. Yes, God wants people to follow God’s counsel and strive to do God’s will. More importantly, God wants to bring us to a spirit of joy without fear. God does this by being present with us.

The people of Judah were facing great challenges. Many of us, especially in Western countries, experience a life of comparative ease and comfort. By reflecting on this story from Zephaniah, we can emphasize two thoughts.

First, we can feel connected through prayer with the people of the world who are indeed suffering the same challenges faced by the people of Judah. We can work to become God’s hands and feet to “remove disaster from you” (v. 18) and turn mourning into dancing.

Second, we recognize that God’s desires are for all people. As Zephaniah puts it, “I will make you renowned and praised among all the people of the earth” (v. 20). The prophet did not say *above* others, but *among* all the people.

Regardless of our circumstances, we can accept that God is in our midst. Because of that, we need not fear. Instead, we can experience joy in unbelievable ways. We can “rejoice…with all [our] heart” (v. 14) and be free of fear. This is good news for any day and any age.

**Questions**

1. Share about a time when you were fearful, but because the presence of the Holy Spirit was “in your midst,” the fear was replaced with peace and perhaps even joy?
2. What are ways you might connect with the people of the world (your community) who are indeed experiencing struggle and challenge?
3. What would it look like in your context to fully acknowledge and live out the belief that God’s desires are for all people?

**Sending**

**Generosity Statement**

Faithful disciples respond to an increasing awareness of the abundant generosity of God by sharing according to the desires of their hearts; not by commandment or constraint.

—Doctrine and Covenants 163:9

The offering basket is available if you would like to support ongoing small-group ministries as part of your generous response.

This offering prayer is adapted from A Disciple’s Generous Response:

God of our discipleship,

As we navigate our world of debt and consumerism, help us to save wisely, spend responsibly, and give generously. In this way may we prepare for the future and create a better tomorrow for our families, friends, the mission of Christ, and the world.

Amen.

**Invitation to Next Meeting**

**Closing Hymn**

*Community of Christ Sings* 401, “View the Present through the Promise”

**Closing Prayer**

Optional Additions Depending on Group

* Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper
* Thoughts for Children

**Communion**

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

—1 Corinthians 11:23–26 NRSV

**Invitation to Communion**

All are welcome at Christ’s table. The Lord’s Supper, or Communion, is a sacrament in which we remember the life, death, resurrection, and continuing presence of Jesus Christ. In Community of Christ, we also experience Communion as an opportunity to renew our baptismal covenant and to be formed as disciples who live Christ’s mission. Others may have different or added understandings within their faith traditions. We invite all who participate in the Lord’s Supper to do so in the love and peace of Jesus Christ.

We share in Communion as an expression of blessing, healing, peace, and community. In preparation let’s sing a hymn 523 from *Community of Christ Sings*, “As We Gather at Your Table.”

**Thoughts for Children**

Materials:

* Hot Chocolate packets

*Say:* Today is the third Sunday in Advent. Advent is a time of waiting, when we prepare ourselves for the coming of Jesus at Christmastime. Each Sunday of Advent we will focus on a different theme. Each theme represents something Jesus brings to the world.

On the third Sunday in Advent, we remember the Joy Jesus brought into the world. Something that brings me joy this time of year is hot chocolate! When you drink hot chocolate on a cold day, what does it feel like? How does it make you feel?

*Affirm all answers.*

Like a warm cup of hot chocolate on a cold winter’s night, joy from Jesus provides comfort and warmth even when life is sad or hard. I am going to give you each a packet of hot chocolate to make later when you have permission that it is a good time. When you drink your hot chocolate, reflect on the things that bring you joy and share a grateful prayer to God for those things.